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Atlantic salmon vs. PCBs

Since the first Atlantic salmon were planted in Michigan in 1972, the Department of Natural Resources has only been able to recover and take eggs from four females.

Last summer, DNR fisheries workers succeeded in stripping 19,000 eggs which eventually resulted in 9,000 Atlantic salmon fry at the Wolf Lake hatchery. All have now died of what it is believed were the effects of PCBs that found their way into the food chain of the salmon while in Lake Michigan.

DNR had hoped the eggs would provide the first link in developing a strain of Atlantics genetically adapted to the Great Lakes.

To date, 78,035 Atlantics have been released into Michigan waters, with the bulk of them going into the Boyne River which flows into Lake Charlevoix. Fair numbers of the salmon returned there to spawn in 1974, while the 1975 run was down sharply. In both years, nearly all of the adult fish died shortly after entering the streams. (Atlantics normally spawn several times.)

A planting of the Atlantics made in Benzie County's Platte River is also regarded as a failure. Only one of the fish is known to have returned to the river in 1975. That one was identified by Walt Houghton, superintendent of the Platte River hatchery. A possibility exists that a few might show up during the summer of 1976 although it is a slim hope, Houghton said.

Some brood stock Atlantics from the original fish obtained from Quebec have been held since then at the Wolf Lake hatchery. Supervisor Jim Copeland there said he expects to have 30,000 fingerling Atlantics from that source ready to plant this spring. Of these, 20,000 are again slated to go into the Boyne River, while DNR is undecided where to release the others. Several rivers are being considered.

In the spring of 1977, Copeland expects to have 40,000 or more Atlantics to plant. These will include 30,000 from the Quebec strain and 10,000 from the Gullspang, fresh water, strain.

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